Protesters force their way into COP30 venue, clash with police

BELEM: Dozens of Indigenous protesters forced their way into the COP30 climate summit venue on Tuesday and clashed with security guards at the entrance to demand climate action and forest protection.

Shouting angrily, protesters demanded access to the UN compound where thousands of delegates from countries around the world are attending this year's UN climate summit in the Amazon city of Belem, Brazil.

Some waved flags with slogans calling for land rights or carried signs saying, "Our land is not for sale." "We can't eat money," said Nato, an Indigenous leader from the Tupinamba community, who uses only one name. "We want our lands free from agribusiness, oil exploration, illegal miners, and illegal loggers." Security guards pushed the protesters back and used tables to barricade the entrance. A Reuters witness saw one security guard being rushed away in a wheelchair while clutching his stomach.

Another guard with a fresh cut above his eye said he had been hit in the head by a heavy drumstick thrown from the crowd. Security confiscated several long, heavy sticks.

The protesters dispersed shortly after the clash. They had been part of a group of hundreds that marched to the venue.

Security guards later allowed delegates to exit the venue, having previously asked them to return inside until the area was clear. Within the compound, the United Nations is responsible for security.

"Earlier this evening, a group of protesters breached security barriers at the main entrance to the COP, causing minor injuries to two security staff, and minor damage to the venue," a spokesperson said in a statement.

"Brazilian and UN security personnel took protective actions to secure the venue, following all established security protocols. Brazilian and UN authorities are investigating the incident. The venue is fully secured, and COP negotiations continue." —Reuters

INDIGENOUS demonstrators gather outside the venue of the UN Climate Change Conference in Belem, Brazil.—Reuters

Zelensky sacks 2 ministers over corruption scandal

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky sacked his justice and energy ministers on Wednesday over a sweeping corruption scandal in the country's war-battered energy sector.

Investigators have alleged a key Zelensky ally orchestrated a $100 million kickback scheme to siphon funds, triggering public anger at a time of widespread power outages caused by Russian attacks.

Ukraine has long been plagued by corruption and cracking down on graft is seen as a key requirement of its bid to join the European Union.

Zelensky said his Justice Minister German Galushchenko, who investigators say was involved in the scheme and received "personal benefits", as well as Energy Minister Svitlana Grynchuk should tender their resignations.

"The minister of justice and the minister of energy cannot remain in their positions," Zelensky said in a video posted on social media.

It is "absolutely unacceptable that there are still some (corruption) schemes in the energy sector" while Ukrainians are facing daily outages from Russian attacks, he added.

The government had earlier suspended Galushchenko, who was energy minister until earlier this year, but he is not yet known to have been charged.

Grynchuk, who took over the energy ministry in July, said earlier that Energoatom, the state nuclear operator at the centre of the investigation, was cooperating with the investigators.

In court on Tuesday, an anti-corruption prosecutor said Timur Mindich, a close ally of President Zelensky, had masterminded the scheme.

Mindich co-owns the production company Kvartal 95, founded by Zelensky, who was a star comedian before running for office.

Zelensky has yet to comment on Mindich, who fled the country shortly before the allegations were announced on Monday.

His production company said the probe was not "related to the work of the studio". Ukraine's prime minister said Kyiv was imposing personal sanctions on Mindich and Oleksandr Tsukerman, another businessman charged in the scheme.

Major test

The corruption scandal and mounting accusations that the Ukrainian presidency is using the judiciary to intimidate and silence critics presents a significant test for Volodymyr Zelensky almost four years into the Russian invasion.

These challenges come at a critical time for Zelensky, who has remained popular and largely unchallenged since Russia invaded in 2022.

It also shows how strained the tightrope that Ukraine has been forced to walk, between centralising power to run the war and forging on with democratic reforms key to joining the EU, is becoming.

The latest case to trigger accusations that Zelensky's team is weaponising the judicial system to intimidate critics was last mont's arrest of Volodymyr Kudrytsky, who led national energy company Ukrenergo until last year, on embezzlement accusations.

Kudrytsky and his backers reject the claims as retribution for criticising Ukraine's strategy to defend the energy grid from Russian attacks.

"It's purely political. It couldn't happen without the involvement of the presidential office," Kudrytsky, currently on bail, said. "I am being lined up as a scapegoat."

The authorities want to "demonstrate what will happen if you comment on sensitive matters", he added, pointing to his strained ties with the country's leadership.

Kudrytsky has won some high-profile supporters.

Business ombudsman Roman Waschuk said the evidence "appears quite flimsy" and warned against "targeting people for simply performing their normal corporate functions".

Opposition lawmaker Inna Sovsun said it was part of a strategy of using criminal investigations to silence people.—AFP

42 migrants feared dead as boat capsizes off Libya

GENEVA: The United Nations said on Wednesday that 42 migrants were missing and presumed dead after a boat capsized off the Libyan coast last week.

It was the latest in a series of similar disasters in a stretch of the Mediterranean Sea that have claimed the lives of more than a thousand people so far this year.

Seven survivors were rescued after six days adrift, the UN's International Organization for Migration said in a statement.

"According to survivors, some individuals were wearing life jackets while others held onto the overturned boat," an IOM spokesman said.

The vessel, carrying 47 men and two women, left Zuwara, west of Tripoli, on November 3 before high waves caused the engine to fail around six hours later, the IOM said.

The boat capsized, throwing all passengers overboard, the statement added. On Saturday, the Libyan authorities carried out a search and rescue operation near the Al Buri oil field.

"After drifting at sea for six days, only seven men — four from Sudan, two from Nigeria, and one from Cameroon — were rescued," the IOM said.

"Tragically, 42 individuals remain missing and are presumed dead, including 29 from Sudan, eight from Somalia, three from Cameroon, and two from Nigeria." IOM staff gave the survivors emergency medical care, food, and water once they were brought ashore. They were transferred to Tripoli.

"Their health condition is reported to be quite good, considering their ordeal, apart from skin irritations from salt water," the IOM spokesman said.

Death toll

More than 1,000 migrants have died this year attempting the main central Mediterranean crossing between North Africa and southern Europe, according to IOM figures.

"With this latest shipwreck, the total has risen even further, reinforcing the urgent need for strengthened regional cooperation, expanded safe and regular migration pathways, and more effective search and rescue operations to prevent further loss of life," the IOM said.—AFP

Drone flies over tank convoy in France

STRASBOURG: French police on Wednesday launched an investigation after an unidentified drone was spotted flying over a police station and a train carrying battle tanks in northeastern France, a police source said.

In recent months, mystery drones have rattled nerves in Europe, with unmanned aerial vehicles flying over sensitive military and industrial sites, shutting down airports and raising concerns about the continent's security.

Suspicions have swirled over potential Russian involvement in drone activity in countries including Britain, Belgium, and Denmark, with tension high as the war in Ukraine drags through its fourth year.

The latest sighting in France occurred over the central police station in the city of Mulhouse near the German border on Tuesday night, the police source said, adding that "at least two round trips" had been seen.—AFP

Music industry says growth threatened by AI, Brexit

LONDON: Britain's music industry contributed 8 billion ($10.5 billion) to the UK economy in 2024, but the effects of Brexit and AI have clouded the sector's outlook, an industry report showed Wednesday.

UK tours by Taylor Swift and Take That helped lift the industry's contribution to the UK economy last year, according to the annual report from UK Music, an umbrella organisation for the industry.

Music exports were also boosted by the international success of artists such as Charli XCX and Lola Young.

However, annual growth was slower than the double-digit increases recorded in the immediate aftermath of the Covid pandemic, the report said.

UK Music's chief executive, Tom Kiehl, warned that the industry faced several challenges, pointing to the "need for urgent action".

He said that the UK government would be judged on the "progress it makes in regulating artificial intelligence and unlocking EU touring".—AFP

Epstein alleged Trump 'knew about the girls', new emails say

WASHINGTON: Democrats released emails on Wednesday in which Jeffrey Epstein suggested that Donald Trump was aware of the financier's sexual abuse and definitely "knew about the girls." Trump has denied any involvement in or knowledge of the sex-trafficking activities of his former friend, who died by suicide in federal prison in 2019 as he was awaiting trial.

But Democrats on the House Oversight Committee said the emails "raise serious questions about Donald Trump and his knowledge of Epstein's horrific crimes." The furor around the disgraced financier is still roiling Trump's administration four months after his Justice Department effectively closed the case, announcing there was no more information to share.

Democrats in the House — keen to capitalize on the simmering controversy — have been trying to force a vote that would compel publication of the full Epstein case files.

The newly released emails were written to longtime associate Ghislaine Maxwell, who was convicted of sex trafficking after Epstein's death, and the author Michael Wolff.

In them, Epstein asserts Trump spent significant time with a woman whom Oversight Democrats describe as a victim of Epstein's sex trafficking.

In one email to Wolff shared by Democrats and dated January 31, 2019, Epstein allegedly wrote: "Trump said he asked me to resign, never a member ever... of course he knew about the girls as he asked ghislaine to stop." In another message from April 2011, Epstein told Maxwell: "I want you to realize that that dog that hasn't barked is Trump." He added that an unnamed victim "spent hours at my house with him ,, he has never once been mentioned." Maxwell replied: "I have been thinking about that..." Democrats on the House Oversight Committee obtained the emails after subpoenaing Epstein's estate earlier this year.

Trump has not been accused of any criminal wrongdoing in connection with Epstein or Maxwell.

Conspiracy theories

In a July 7 memo, the Justice Department said the Epstein "client list" that Attorney General Pam Bondi claimed to have been reviewing did not in fact exist, and reaffirmed that he died by suicide in his prison cell.

It sparked a furious backlash from Trump's "MAGA" support base, who have for years been told by their leaders that a "deep state" cover-up was protecting figures in the Democratic Party whom they accused of being Epstein's clients.

Trump's MAGA lieutenants — including two allies who have since been hired to run the FBI — made careers of fanning the conspiracy theories, including that Epstein's suicide was actually a murder ordered by his powerful clients.

Prominent online influencers and media figures in the movement — as well as ordinary voters — have spoken of feeling betrayed after Trump began publicly castigating them for wanting answers.

Trump's ties to Epstein are extensive. The pair were pictured partying together during a 15-year friendship before they reportedly fell out in 2004 over a property deal, and when Trump subsequently denounced his former ally.

Epstein admitted to two state felony prostitution charges in 2008 as part of a plea deal — arranged by a prosecutor who would go on to serve in Trump's cabinet — that was widely criticized as being too lenient.—AFP

NEWSMAKERS

MOERAKI: A Chinese child takes pictures of his parents, by a boulder, on New Zealand's Koekohe beach.—AFP

RESEARCHERS hold a 300-millimetre silicon wafer containing the new quantum computing chip.—Reuters

QUITO: A woman participates in a gathering calling upon people to vote NO in a referendum on Nov 16. Ecuadoreans will vote on four key issues: allowing foreign military bases, convening a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution, eliminating state funding for political parties, and reducing the number of legislators.—AFP

WASHINGTON: Dogs greet guests as they arrive to attend the funeral service for Jane Goodall, the chimpanzee expert and environmentalist, at the National Cathedral. Goodall, who transformed the study of chimpanzees and became one of the world's most revered wildlife advocates, died aged 91 on Oct 1.—AFP

IBM claims new chip shows path to 'useful' quantum computers by 2029

SAN FRANCISCO: IBM announced on Wednesday that it has built a new experimental quantum computing chip called Loon that demonstrates it has hit a key milestone toward making useful quantum computers before the end of the decade.

Quantum computers could someday solve problems that would take classical computers thousands of years. But due to the uncertain nature of quantum mechanics, the chips are prone to errors.

Correcting those errors is the key focus of tech giants such as Alphabet's Google and Amazon that are chasing quantum computers alongside IBM. In 2021, IBM proposed a new way of doing error correction: adapt an algorithm for improving cellphone signals to quantum computing and run it on a combination of quantum chips and classical computing chips.

The downside of IBM's idea is that the quantum chips become harder to build because they must contain not only basic building blocks of quantum chips called "qubits" but also new quantum connections between the qubits, Mark Horvath, a vice president and analyst at research firm Gartner, told Reuters in an interview.

"It's very, very clever," Horvath said. "Now, they're actually putting it in chips, so that's super exciting." Jay Gambetta, director of IBM Research and an IBM fellow, said the key was tapping the Albany NanoTech Complex in New York, which houses the same chipmaking tools as the most advanced factories in the world.

Loon remains in its early stages, and IBM did not disclose when outsiders can test it. But the company also announced on Wednesday a chip named "Nighthawk" that will be available at the end of this year.—Reuters

KAMPALA: John Okumu, a technician at Uganda Industrial Research Institute, cuts a cow horn from slaughterhouses. These are transformed into stylish, eco-friendly eyeglass frames to make eyecare more affordable and accessible.—Reuters